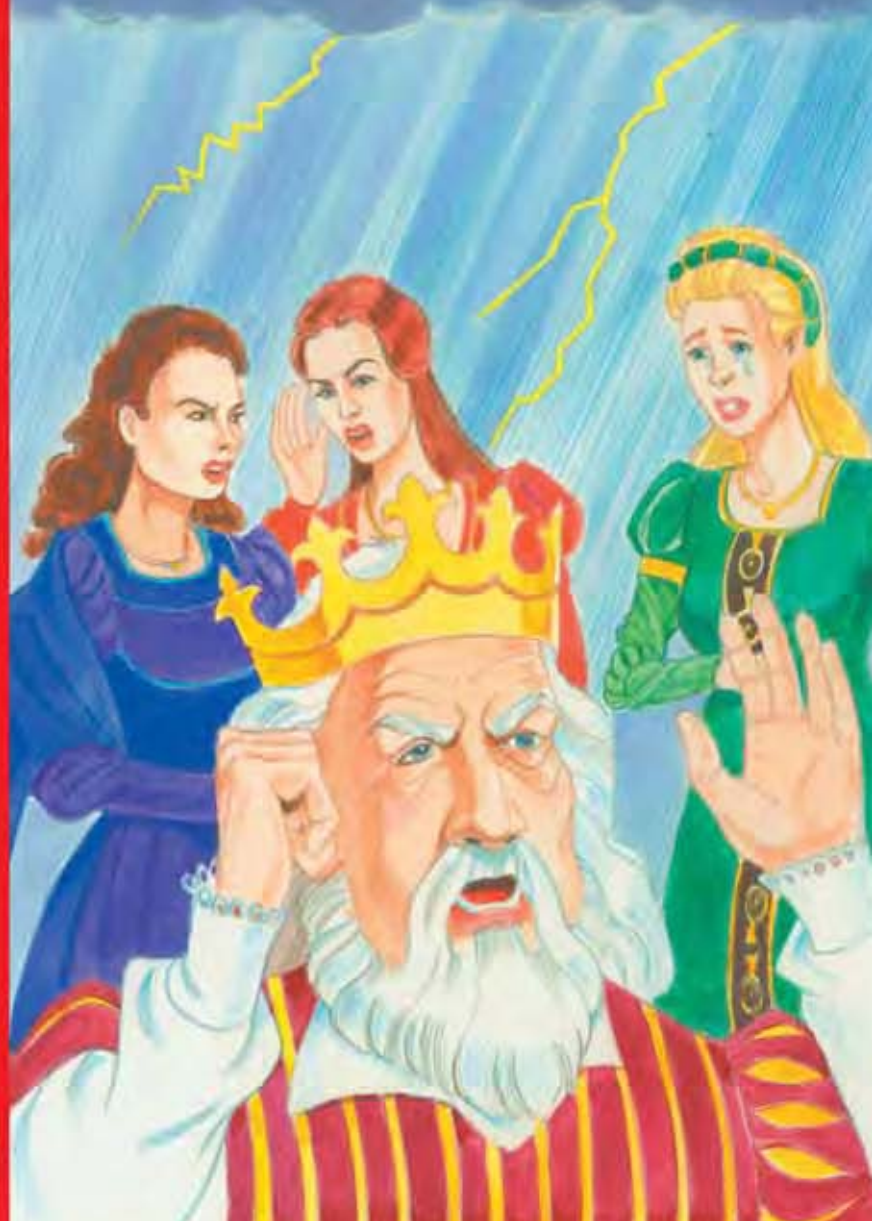


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KING LEAR

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



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KING LEAR

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ADAPTED BY

Emily Hutchinson



Hamlet
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The Merchant of Venice
A Midsummer Night's Dream
Othello
Romeo and Juliet
The Tempest
Twelfth Night

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Cover and Interior Art: Black Eagle Productions



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ISBN 1-56254-853-0

Printed in the United States of America
11 10 09 08 07 06 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

ACT 1	Scene 1	5
	Scene 2	14
	Scene 3	18
	Scene 4	19
	Scene 5	27
ACT 2	Scene 1	29
	Scene 2	33
	Scene 3	36
	Scene 4	37
ACT 3	Scene 1	46
	Scene 2	47
	Scene 3	49
	Scene 4	50
	Scene 5	53
	Scene 6	54
	Scene 7	57
ACT 4	Scene 1	62
	Scene 2	64
	Scene 3	67
	Scene 4	69
	Scene 5	70
	Scene 6	72
	Scene 7	78
ACT 5	Scene 1	82
	Scene 2	84
	Scene 3	85

BACKGROUND

King Lear, a stubborn and proud old man, decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. He'll give the largest share to the one who loves him most. Unable to tell the difference between flattery and sincere love, he banishes his youngest daughter, the honest Cordelia. He divides the kingdom between Goneril and Regan. These two "gilded serpents" stop pretending affection. They work together to strip him of every possession, no longer pretending any affection. Lear slowly goes mad, but in his lowest state he begins to know himself as a human being.

Like Lear, Gloucester is also blind to the evil he has fathered—in his illegitimate son Edmund. He sees the truth only after he has been literally blinded by his enemies and saved from despair and suicide by his son Edgar. Evil does its worst to both Lear and Gloucester—but the positive result of their physical destruction is spiritual renewal.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

LEAR King of Britain

KING OF FRANCE one of Cordelia's suitors

GONERIL Lear's eldest daughter

DUKE OF ALBANY Goneril's husband

REGAN Lear's second daughter

DUKE OF CORNWALL Regan's husband

CORDELIA Lear's youngest daughter

DUKE OF BURGUNDY one of Cordelia's suitors

EARL OF KENT loyal member of Lear's court

EARL OF GLOUCESTER loyal member of Lear's court

EDGAR Gloucester's elder son, later disguised as

Poor Tom, a ragged beggar

EDMUND Gloucester's younger, illegitimate son

OSWALD Goneril's steward

CURAN Gloucester's servant

OLD MAN Gloucester's tenant

DOCTOR

FOOL Lear's jester

KNIGHTS, OFFICERS, MESSENGERS, SOLDIERS, SERVANTS, and ATTENDANTS

ACT 1

Scene 1

England. A room of state in King Lear's palace. Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund enter.

KENT: I thought the king loved the Duke of Albany more than the Duke of Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER: Now that he has divided his kingdom, it's not clear which of the dukes he values most. Their shares are so equal that neither one would prefer the other's.

KENT (*indicating Edmund*): Isn't this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER: I fathered him, sir. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am hardened to it.

KENT: I cannot conceive why.

GLOUCESTER: Sir, this young fellow's mother could! So she got pregnant and had a son for her cradle before she had a husband for her bed. Do you see a fault?

KENT: I cannot wish the fault undone, the result of it being so handsome!

GLOUCESTER: But I have, sir, a legitimate son, older than this one, though I don't favor

him because of that. Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND: No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER (*introducing him formally*): The Lord of Kent, and my honorable friend.

EDMUND: At your service, my lord.

(The sound of trumpets is heard.)

GLOUCESTER: The king is coming.

(A servant enters, carrying a crown, followed by King Lear, the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and attendants.)

LEAR: Bring in the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER: I shall, my lord.

(Gloucester and Edmund exit.)

LEAR: Meanwhile we shall reveal our plan.

Give me that map. *(Servants bring a map.)*

We have divided our kingdom into three parts.

We wish to shake off all care in our old age,

And to confer them on younger shoulders,

While we crawl toward death without burdens.

Tell me, my daughters, which of you

Shall we say loves us most?

Then we may be most generous where

Natural affection most deserves it. Goneril,

Our eldest child, speak first.

GONERIL: Sir, I love you more than I can say.
You are dearer than eyesight, space, and
liberty.
No less than life itself.

CORDELIA (*aside*): What shall Cordelia say? Just
love, and be silent . . .

LEAR (*indicating Goneril's dowry on the map*): From
Here to here, rich with shady forests,
Fertile plains, and teeming rivers,
We give you to rule forever. (*turning to Regan*)
What does our second daughter say? Speak.

REGAN: I want no other joy than
The happiness I find in your dear love.

CORDELIA (*aside*): Poor Cordelia, then!
But not really so, since I am sure my love is
Richer than my tongue can express.

LEAR: To you and your heirs, take this third
Of our fair kingdom. No less in space, value,
And pleasure than that given to Goneril.
(*turning to Cordelia*) Now, our joy, last-born
But not least—what can you say to attract
A third more valuable than your sisters?
Speak.

CORDELIA: Nothing, my lord.

LEAR: Nothing!

CORDELIA: Nothing.

LEAR: Nothing can come of nothing. Speak again.

CORDELIA: I cannot express what is in my heart.
I love your majesty as a daughter should.
No more, no less.

LEAR: What, what, Cordelia?

CORDELIA: My good lord,
You have fathered me, taught me, loved me.
I return those duties as I should.
I obey you, love you, and honor you most.
Why do my sisters have husbands
If they say all their love is for you?
I hope that when I marry, my husband
Has half my love, care, and duty.

LEAR: Do these words come from your heart?

CORDELIA: Yes, my good lord.

LEAR: So young, and so hardhearted?

CORDELIA: So young, my lord, and truthful.

LEAR: Let your truth then be your dowry!
By the sacred light of the sun, by all the stars
That govern our lives, I hereby disown you!
You are now a stranger to my heart and me.
Stay away forever, my former daughter.

KENT: Your majesty—

LEAR: Silence, Kent! I loved Cordelia most
And thought I would spend my final years
with her. Go, out of my sight!
My grave will be my only peace, since here
I take her father's love from her.

Cornwall and Albany, with my
Two daughters' dowries, add this third:
Let pride, which she calls truth, marry her!
I turn over to you my power, authority, and
All the ceremony that goes with kingship.
We shall live with you on alternate months,
Keeping the right to have 100 knights
Maintained at your expense.
We retain only the title and all the honors
due to a king.
Policy, taxation, and business matters,
Beloved sons, will be yours. To confirm this,
This crown is divided between you.

(The servant presents the crown to the dukes.)

KENT: Royal Lear, whom I have always
Honored as my king, loved as my father—
Kent must be rude when Lear is mad.
What are you doing, old man? Honor
demands plain talk when kings fall to folly.
Keep your kingdom,
And think again about your rash decision.
I'll stake my life on it—your youngest
daughter does not love you least.
Nor are they empty-hearted whose speeches
Contain no hollow flattery.

LEAR: Kent, on your life, say no more!

KENT: I do not fear losing my life when your
safety is the goal.

LEAR: Out of my sight!

KENT: See better, Lear, and let me—as ever—
Remain clear-sighted on your behalf.

LEAR: Hear me, traitor! Since you have tried
To make us break our vow—
Which we have never done before—hear this!
We give you five days to prepare yourself
For the troubles of the world.
On the sixth day, turn your hated back
Upon our kingdom. If you are seen here
On the tenth day—that moment is your death.
Away! By Jupiter, this will not be revoked!

KENT: Farewell, King. If this is what you want,
Freedom is elsewhere.
(*to Cordelia*) The gods protect you, maid.
Your thinking is right, and your words are true!
(*to Regan and Goneril*) May your deeds live up
to your fancy speeches.

(Kent exits. Trumpets announce the entry of Gloucester, the King of France, the Duke of Burgundy, and their attendants.)

LEAR: My Lord of Burgundy, we address you first.
You have been courting our daughter.
What is the *least* dowry you would require,
Without which you'd end your quest of love?

BURGUNDY: Most royal majesty, I beg no more
Than your highness has already offered.

LEAR: When we loved her, we valued her more.

Now her price has fallen.
As she stands, she comes with our
Displeasure, and nothing more. No dowry.
If you want her, she is yours.

BURGUNDY (*upset*): I don't know what to say.

LEAR: Will you take her or leave her?

BURGUNDY: Pardon me, royal sir,
Decisions cannot be made on such terms.

LEAR: Then leave her, sir, for I'm telling you
That's all she's worth. (*to France*) As for you,
great king, I would not risk our friendship
By marrying you to one I hate. So I beg you
To turn your affection in a worthier direction.

FRANCE: This is very strange! She was so precious
To you, the comfort of your old age.
Suddenly she has done a thing so monstrous
As to destroy all your affection? Your love
Must have been false, or her offense very
Great indeed. I could never believe that of her.

CORDELIA: I beg your majesty to make it known
That it is no vicious deed, murder, or evil
That has deprived me of your grace and favor.
Rather, it is because I lack
an eye for seeking favors and
such a tongue that I am glad not to have.

FRANCE: Is this all? A natural shyness that often
Keeps inner thoughts unspoken? My Lord
Of Burgundy, what do you say to the lady?

Love's not love when it is mixed with
concerns that miss the entire point.
Will you have her? She is a dowry in herself.

BURGUNDY (to Lear): Royal king, just give
The dowry that you yourself proposed,
And I'll take Cordelia by the hand right now.

LEAR: I give nothing. I have sworn it.

BURGUNDY (to Cordelia): I am sorry, then.
Losing a father has lost you a husband.

CORDELIA: Peace be with Burgundy!
Since he loves respectability and wealth
So much, I shall not be his wife.

FRANCE: Fairest Cordelia, you and your virtues
I here claim! If it is lawful, I will take up
What has been cast away. The gods! The gods!
It's strange that their cold neglect
Should inflame my love!
Let your penniless daughter be my queen.
Say farewell, Cordelia, though they are unkind,
You lose here to gain more elsewhere.

LEAR: Take her, France. We have no daughter,
Nor shall we ever see her face again. Go,
Without our grace, our love, or our blessing.
Come, noble Burgundy.

**(Lear, Burgundy, Cornwall, Albany, Gloucester, and
attendants exit.)**

FRANCE: Say goodbye to your sisters.

CORDELIA: My father's jewels, in tears I leave you.

I know what you are, but as a sister, I hesitate
To name your faults. I leave our father to
Your so-called love, though
I would prefer a better place for him.

GONERIL: Try to make your husband happy.
He has taken you as a handout from fortune.
You deserve what you got.

CORDELIA: Time will reveal what deceit hides.
Those who conceal their faults are finally
shamed. May you prosper well!

FRANCE: Come, my fair Cordelia.

(France and Cordelia exit.)

GONERIL: Sister, we have mutual interests to
discuss. Our father will leave tonight.

REGAN: With *you*. Next month he'll stay with us.

GONERIL: You see how much he changes in his
old age! He always loved our sister most.
His poor judgment is clear
From the way he has now cast her off.

REGAN: It's because he's so old. But then,
He has always lacked self-control.

GONERIL: Even in his prime he was hotheaded.
So now we must expect to see
Not only his lifelong faults—but new ones
That come with age and infirmity.

REGAN: No doubt we can expect sudden whims
Such as Kent's banishment.

GONERIL: And there's the rude way he said
goodbye to France! Well, then, let's work
together on this. If our father continues
to exercise his authority so rashly,
he will be a problem to us.

REGAN: We must do something—and soon!

(Goneril and Regan exit.)

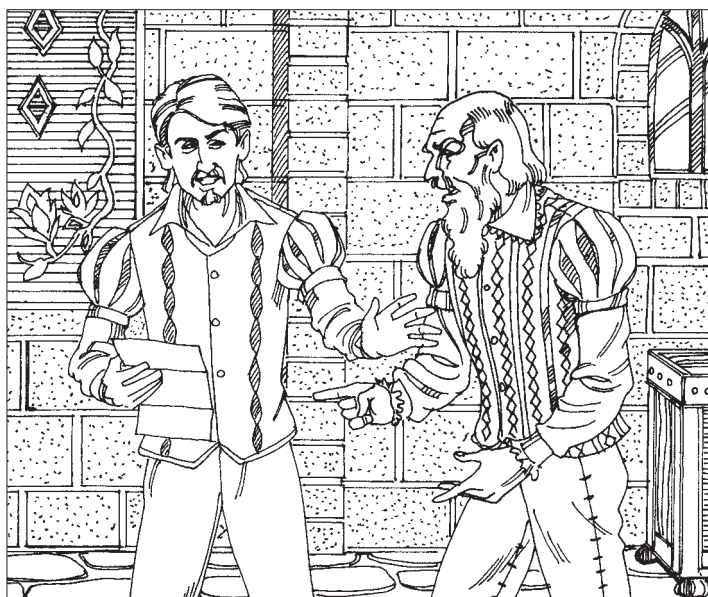
Scene 2

A hall in the Earl of Gloucester's castle. Edmund enters, holding a letter.

EDMUND *(to himself)*: Why should society
Limit my rights, just because I am
12 or 14 months younger than my brother?
And why—just because my father didn't marry
My mother—am I considered inferior?
I am as smart and as good-looking as the son
Of any married woman. Legitimate Edgar,
I must have your inheritance! Our father
Loves me just as much as he loves you.
(waving the letter) If this letter succeeds
And my plan works, Edmund the illegitimate
Will beat Edgar the legitimate! I will prosper!

(His father, the Earl of Gloucester, enters.)

GLOUCESTER: Kent banished like that!
And France has left in anger!



The king has limited his own power.

All this done on a whim!

(noticing his son) Edmund, hello! What news?

EDMUND: No news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER: Why are you hiding that letter?

EDMUND: It's nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER: Then why hide it? Let me see.

EDMUND: I beg you, sir, pardon me. It's from my brother, and I haven't finished it. From what I've read so far, I find it's not fit for your eyes.

GLOUCESTER: Give me the letter, sir!

EDMUND: I hope, for my brother's sake, that he wrote this just to test my virtue.

GLOUCESTER (*reading aloud*): *Revering old people too much makes our best years bitter. It keeps our fortunes from us until we're too old to enjoy them! I'm beginning to feel oppressed by an aged tyrant who rules not through strength, but because I allow it. Come and see me, so I can talk to you about this. If our father would only sleep till I awakened him, you'd enjoy half his income forever, and live beloved by your brother, Edgar.*

Could he have written this? Does he have a brain to think of it? When did you get it?

EDMUND: It was thrown through my window.

GLOUCESTER: It's Edgar's handwriting!

EDMUND: I hope his heart isn't in the contents.

GLOUCESTER: Has he ever spoken of this before?

EDMUND: Never, my lord. But I have heard him say that when sons mature and fathers age, the sons should manage the money.

GLOUCESTER: Oh, the villain! That's exactly what he says in the letter. Worse than a villain! Go, sir, find him. I'll arrest him. Where is he?

EDMUND: I do not know, my lord. But I would stake my life on his honor. Perhaps he's not dangerous, but only testing my love for you.

GLOUCESTER: Do you think so?

EDMUND: If you think it's a good idea, I'll place

you where you can listen to us talk about this. Then we'll both know the truth.

GLOUCESTER: He cannot be such a monster—

EDMUND: I am sure he is not.

GLOUCESTER: —to his own father, who so tenderly and entirely loves him. Edmund, find him. I must be sure of his innocence!

EDMUND: I'll find him and report back to you.

GLOUCESTER: Sound him out, Edmund—
But do it carefully.

(Gloucester exits. A moment later, Edgar enters.)

EDGAR: Greetings, brother Edmund!
Why do you look so grim?

EDMUND: When did you last see our father?

EDGAR: Last night.

EDMUND: Did you speak with him?

EDGAR: Yes, for two hours.

EDMUND: Did he seem displeased in any way?

EDGAR: Not at all.

EDMUND: Somehow you've offended him.
I think you'd better avoid him until time has cooled the heat of his anger.

EDGAR: Some villain has wronged me!

EDMUND: That's what I fear. Still, I advise you to stay away till his temper cools down. Come with me to my place. At just the right time

I'll let you overhear what he says. Please go—
here's my key. If you do go out, go armed.

EDGAR: *Armed*, you say?

EDMUND: Brother, it's for the best. Please, go!

EDGAR: Shall I hear from you soon?

EDMUND: As soon as possible. Leave it to me.

(Edgar exits and Edmund talks to himself.)

A gullible father! And a noble brother
Whose very nature is so harmless
That he suspects no one. This will be easy!
I'll get my inheritance one way or the other.

(Edmund exits.)

Scene 3

A room in the Duke of Albany's palace. Goneril and Oswald enter.

GONERIL: Did my father strike my officer for
teasing his fool?

OSWALD: Yes, madam.

GONERIL (angry): I won't put up with it!
His knights misbehave, yet he scolds us
About every little thing. When he returns
From hunting, I won't see him. Say I am sick.

OSWALD: He's coming, madam. I hear him.

(Hunting horns can be heard.)

GONERIL: Be as rude as you please.

If he doesn't like it, let him go to my sister.

We both agree not to give in to him.

Silly old man. He thinks he can still manage

All that he has given away!

OSWALD: Very well, madam.

GONERIL: And be cooler to his knights.

Tell the other servants to do the same.

I'll write to my sister at once, telling her
to follow suit.

Prepare for dinner.

(They exit.)

Scene 4

Another room in Albany's palace. Kent enters, disguised.

KENT: If I can disguise my voice as well as I have

Disguised my looks, my plan will work.

By serving in spite of being banished,

Perhaps my master, whom I love,

Will see that I am still a loyal servant.

*(Hunting horns announce Lear's arrival, along with his
knights and attendants.)*

LEAR: Well, now! Who are you?

KENT: A man, sir.

LEAR: What do you want with us?

KENT: Employment.

LEAR: With whom?

KENT: You.

LEAR: What services can you perform?

KENT: I can keep a secret, ride, run, ruin a good story by telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly. My best quality is determination.

LEAR: Follow me. You may be my servant. If I like you no less after dinner, you can stay on permanently. (*to an attendant*) Get my fool.

(*An attendant exits. Oswald enters.*)

You, fellow, where's my daughter?

OSWALD (*brushing past him*): Excuse me. (*He exits.*)

LEAR: What did he say? Call the blockhead back!

(*A knight goes in pursuit.*)

Where's my fool?

I think the world's asleep.

(*The knight enters again.*)

Well, now! Where's that mongrel?

KNIGHT: My lord, he says your daughter is ill.

LEAR: Why didn't he return when I called him?

KNIGHT: Sir, he rudely said that he would not.

LEAR: He *would not*?

KNIGHT: My lord, I don't know what's wrong—
but in my opinion your highness is not
being treated with the respect you once
were. Duty won't allow me to be silent

when your highness is being wronged.

LEAR: You are only saying aloud what I've been thinking myself. I'll look further into it.
(*to attendant*) Now tell my daughter I want to see her. And call my fool here, too.

(*Attendant exits. Oswald enters again.*)

You. Come here, sir. Who am I, sir?

OSWALD: My lady's father.

LEAR: "My lady's father!" You lousy dog! Wretch!

OSWALD: I am none of these, my lord.

LEAR: Do you contradict me, you rascal?

(*He strikes Oswald angrily.*)

OSWALD: I'll not be struck, my lord.

KENT (*tripping him*): Nor tripped either, I suppose?

(*Oswald falls to the ground.*)

LEAR (*to Kent*): I thank you, fellow. You're my servant, and I'll take care of you.

KENT (*to Oswald*): Come on, sir, get up!
I'll teach you your place! Go!

(*He pushes Oswald out.*)

LEAR: Now, my loyal new servant, I thank you.
Here's something for your service.

(*Lear gives Kent money. The fool enters.*)

LEAR: Hello, my pretty fellow. How are you?

FOOL (*to Kent*): Sir, you'd better take my cap.

(The fool offers Kent his jester's cap.)

KENT: Why, fool?

FOOL: Why, for siding with someone who is out of favor! If you don't side with the winners, you'll soon be out in the cold.

LEAR: Be careful, sir, or you'll be whipped!

FOOL: Truth's a dog that's sent to his kennel.
He gets whipped. But flattery, the mongrel dog, is allowed to stand by the fire and stink.

LEAR *(remembering how he banished Cordelia for telling the truth)*: A bitter cup for me!

FOOL: Do you know the difference
Between a bitter fool and a sweet one?

LEAR: No, lad. Tell me.

FOOL: The lord who advised you
To give away your land,
Come place him here by me.
You may stand in his place.
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear.
The one in fool's clothes here—
The other one standing there!
(He points to Lear as the bitter one.)

LEAR: Do you call me a *fool*, boy?

FOOL: You have given away all your other titles—
That one you were born with.

KENT: He's not *all* fool, my lord.

FOOL: No, indeed. Uncle, give me an egg, and
I'll give you two crowns.

LEAR: What two crowns would they be?

FOOL: Why, after I have cut the egg in half and
eaten the yolk, the two halves of the
eggshell! Remember when you chopped
your crown in the middle and gave away
both parts? You had little sense in your
bald crown when you gave your golden
one away. If I'm speaking like a fool here,
whip the man who first finds it so.

LEAR: If you are lying, sir, you'll be whipped.

FOOL: I marvel at how alike you and your
daughters are. They'll have me whipped
for speaking the truth, and you'll have me
whipped for lying! I'd rather be anything
else but a fool. But I would not want to
be *you*, uncle. You have sliced your brains in
two and left nothing in the middle. Look!
Here comes one of the halves.

(Goneril enters.)

LEAR: Well, daughter. Why the frowning face?

GONERIL: All of your rude followers are
Bickering and quarreling by the hour.
They break out into riots. I thought you'd
Do something when I first told you.
But now it looks as if you not only allow
This behavior, but encourage it.

LEAR: Are you really our daughter?

GONERIL: Come, sir! I wish you would use
The common sense I know you still have,
And stop behaving as you've been doing lately.

LEAR: Does anyone here know me?
Does Lear walk this way? Speak this way?
Can anyone here tell me who I am?
I'd really like to know! From the evidence
Of knowledge and reason, I'd be misled
Into thinking I had daughters.

GONERIL: This spectacle, sir, is on the same order
As your other pranks. Please understand me.
As you are old and respected, be wise.
Here you keep 100 knights and squires.
These men are so disorderly, drunk, and bold
That our court—influenced by their actions—
Looks like a rowdy inn. It is more like a tavern
Than a gracious palace. This must be stopped!
I urge you to reduce the
Size of your retinue by half.
Keep the ones who are closer to your age—
Those who can control themselves and you.

LEAR: Darkness and devils! Saddle my horses!
Call my men together! You ungrateful wretch!
I'll not trouble you any longer.
I still have one daughter left!

(Albany enters.)

Oh, sir, so you're here! Is this your doing?

Speak, sir. (*to his servants*) Prepare my horses.

ALBANY: Please, sir, settle down.

LEAR (*to Goneril*): Vulture! You tell lies!

My troops are men of rare value.

They know their duties and act honorably.

Oh, how such a small fault in Cordelia

Seemed so ugly! It drew love from my heart,
making me bitter.

(*Kent and the knights exit.*)

ALBANY: My lord, I am as guiltless

As I am ignorant of what has upset you.

LEAR: It may be so, my lord. (*turning to Goneril*)

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is

To have a thankless child!

(*Lear exits, overcome with emotion.*)

ALBANY: Where did that come from?

GONERIL: Don't bother yourself to find out.

Let his moods be ruled by his old age.

(*Lear enters again.*)

LEAR: What, 50 of my followers all at once?

Within two weeks?

ALBANY: What's the matter, sir?

LEAR: I'll tell you. (*to Goneril*) Life and death!

I am ashamed that you can shake my

Manly dignity like this, as if you are worthy

Of these hot tears, which burst from me.

Storms and fogs upon you!
May the deep wounds of a father's curse
Pierce every one of your senses.
Foolish old eyes, if you cry any more,
I'll pluck you out and trample you!
Has it really come to this? Let it be so.
I have another daughter! I am sure
That she is kind and comforting.

(Lear, Kent, and attendants exit.)

GONERIL: Did you see that?

ALBANY: For all the great love I have for you,
Goneril, I cannot believe that—

GONERIL *(stopping him)*: That's enough.
(calling out) Oswald! Come here!
(to the fool) Go after your master.

FOOL: Uncle Lear, take the fool with you!

(The fool runs off after Lear.)

GONERIL *(sarcastically)*: My father has been
well-advised. One hundred knights! Indeed!
After every complaint or dislike, he can
Back up his senile ways with their powers,
And hold our lives at his mercy.

ALBANY: Well, you may be worrying too much.

GONERIL: That's safer than trusting too much.
I know his heart. I've written to my sister
About what he has said. If she lets him and
His 100 knights stay,

After I've explained what a bad idea it is—

(Oswald enters again.)

Well, now, Oswald!

Do you have that letter to my sister?

OSWALD: Yes, madam.

GONERIL: Take some men with you and ride off.

Tell her fully of my particular fears, and add

Such reasons of your own to convince her.

Go now, and hurry back!

(Oswald exits.)

This gentle attitude of yours,

My lord, though I do not condemn it—

I do disagree with it.

ALBANY: How far you are right, I cannot tell.

Sometimes it's best to leave things alone.

GONERIL: Well, then.

ALBANY: Well, well. We'll see what happens.

(They exit.)

Scene 5

*A room in the Duke of Albany's palace. **Lear, Kent,** and the **fool** enter.*

LEAR: Go to Gloucester with this letter.

KENT: I will not sleep until I've delivered it.

(Kent exits.)

KING LEAR

FOOL: You'll see your other daughter will treat you the same way. I can tell what I can tell.

LEAR: What can you tell, boy?

FOOL: I can tell you why a snail has a house.

LEAR: Why?

FOOL: To put his head in—not to give it to his daughters and leave himself homeless.

LEAR: So kind a father! Are my horses ready?

FOOL: Your men are preparing them.

LEAR: I'll take my kingdom back again!

FOOL: If you were my fool, uncle, I'd have you beaten for being old before your time.

LEAR: What do you mean?

FOOL: You shouldn't have grown old until you were wise.

LEAR: Oh, let me not be mad, sweet heaven!
Keep me sane. I don't want to be mad!

(A **gentleman** enters.)

Are the horses ready?

GENTLEMAN: Ready, my lord.

LEAR (to the fool): Come, boy.

(**They** exit.)

ACT 2

Scene 1

*The Earl of Gloucester's castle. **Edmund** and **Curan** enter.*

CURAN: I have told your father that the Duke of Cornwall and Regan will be here tonight.

EDMUND: How has that come about?

CURAN: I don't know. Have you heard the rumors?

EDMUND: No. What are they?

CURAN: You haven't heard of the likely wars between the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

EDMUND: Not a word.

CURAN: You will soon, no doubt. Farewell, sir.

*(**Curan** exits.)*

EDMUND: The duke will be here tonight? Great! This fits in with my plan. My father Has hidden himself to overhear my brother. *(Seeing **Edgar** enter, from a staircase.)* I have one thing to do first. Brother, a word! *(to the audience)* My father is watching! *(to **Edgar**, in a whisper)* Sir, run away! Your hiding place has been found out. Haven't you been speaking against Cornwall? He's coming here tonight, with Regan.

Have you said anything
To support his argument with Albany?

EDGAR: No, not a word.

EDMUND: I hear my father coming. Pardon me.
I must pretend to draw my sword on you.
(*He draws.*) Draw yours. Pretend to fight.

(*Edgar, confused, does as he is told.*)

Do your best! (*loudly, so Gloucester can hear*)
Surrender!

(*They continue to pretend to fight. Edmund whispers to Edgar.*)

Run now, brother. Farewell!

(*Edgar runs off.*)

Some blood on me would hint
That I had a tough struggle. (*He cuts his arm.*)
Father! Father! (*calling after Edgar*) Stop! Stop!
Will no one help?

(*Gloucester enters, with servants carrying torches.*)

GLOUCESTER: Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND: Look, sir, I'm bleeding!

GLOUCESTER: Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND (*pointing*): He ran that way, sir.

GLOUCESTER: Follow him, quick! Go!

(*Servants exit, running after Edgar.*)

EDMUND: He tried to get me to murder you,

But I told him the revenging gods were harsh
With those who killed their fathers.

When he saw how firmly I was against his plan,
He drew his sword and cut my arm.

Then I defended myself, and he ran off.

GLOUCESTER: No matter how far he runs,
Nowhere in this land shall he remain free.
He'll be found and killed!

EDMUND: When I said I'd expose him,
He said, "Who would believe you?
I'd deny everything and blame it on you—
even if you produced my own handwriting!
Any idiot could see that you would profit
from my death."

GLOUCESTER: He's no son of mine!
I'll send that villain's picture
Far and near, for all the kingdom to see.
And I'll arrange for you, loyal and true son,
to inherit my lands.

(Trumpets are heard.)

Listen! The duke's trumpets.

(Cornwall, Regan, and attendants enter.)

CORNWALL: Greetings, my noble friend!
I've just heard some strange news.

REGAN: If it's true, no vengeance is too great.
How are you, my lord?

GLOUCESTER: Madam, my old heart is broken!

REGAN: Did my father's godson seek your life?
Was it your Edgar?

GLOUCESTER: Shame would have it hidden!

REGAN: Was he with the riotous knights
Who served my father?

GLOUCESTER: I don't know, madam.

EDMUND: Yes, madam, he was with them.

REGAN: No wonder then that he was so disloyal.
They want him to plan the old man's death
So he can spend the old man's wealth.
Just this evening my sister told me about
them—

With such warnings that if they come
To stay with me, I won't be there.

CORNWALL: Nor I, Regan, I assure you.
Edmund, I hear that you have been a good
son to your father.

EDMUND: It was my duty, sir.

GLOUCESTER: He exposed Edgar's plot and got
This wound you see, trying to arrest him.

CORNWALL: Is Edgar being pursued?

GLOUCESTER: Yes, my good lord.

CORNWALL: If he is caught, never fear him again.
Use my resources as you please. As for you,
Edmund, you shall be one of us from now on.
Such loyal, trustworthy men are always needed.

EDMUND (*bowing*): I am at your service, sir.

CORNWALL: We are here on an important matter.

REGAN: Our father has written—

So has our sister—about certain quarrels.

I want to answer him away from home.

The messengers are waiting to be sent.

Our good old friend, give us your

Much-needed advice about this business.

GLOUCESTER: I serve you, madam.

(Trumpets sound as all exit.)

Scene 2

Before Gloucester's castle. Kent and Oswald meet.

KENT: I know you, man. You are a knave, a rascal, and a coward!

OSWALD: Why, what a monstrous fellow you are, to say that to someone you don't even know!

KENT: What a scoundrel you are to deny knowing me! Isn't it just two days since I beat you and tripped you before the king? Draw your sword, you rogue!
(drawing his sword) Draw!

OSWALD: Go! I'll have nothing to do with you!

KENT: Draw, you rascal! You're here with letters against the king, and you take your lady's side against her royal father. Draw, you rogue!

OSWALD: Help! Murder! Help!

KENT: Fight, you coward! Fight!

(Kent beats Oswald with the broad side of his sword.)

OSWALD: Help! Murder! Murder!

(Edmund, Cornwall, Regan, Gloucester, and servants enter.)

GLOUCESTER: Weapons! Fighting! What's all this?

REGAN: They are the messengers from our sister
and the king.

CORNWALL: What is your quarrel? Speak.

KENT: No two men hate each other more than
that rogue and I.

CORNWALL (to Oswald): What did you do to him?

OSWALD: Nothing. A recent misunderstanding
Made him trip me. When I fell, he insulted me.
Then he made himself out to be such a hero
That the king praised him for tackling a man
Who wasn't putting up a fight. Inspired by
His earlier success, he drew on me here again.

CORNWALL: Bring the stocks here!

You stubborn rogue, we'll teach you!

KENT: Sir, I am too old to learn. Don't call

Your stocks for me. I serve the king.

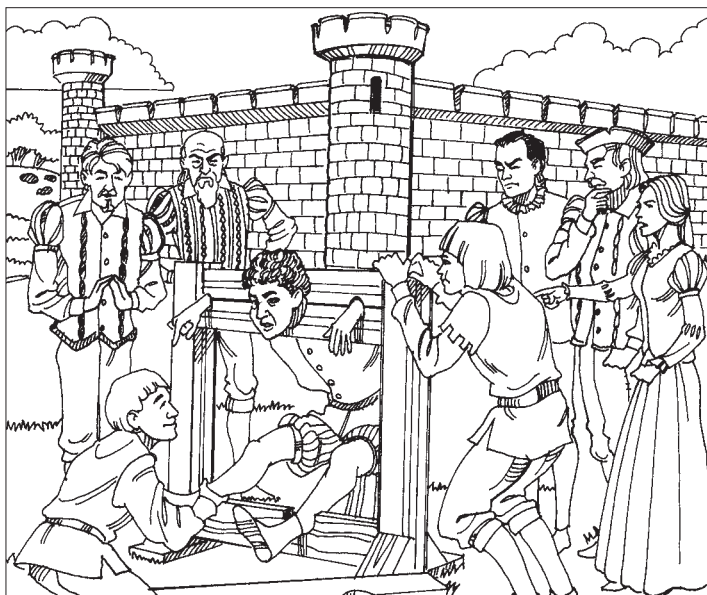
In putting his messenger in the stocks,

You would be showing disrespect to the king.

CORNWALL: Get the stocks! Upon my word,

He shall sit there till noon.

REGAN: Till noon? Till *night*, my lord!



KENT: Why, madam, if I were your father's dog,
You wouldn't treat me like that.

REGAN: Sir, since you're his knave, I will.

(Servants carry the stocks in.)

GLOUCESTER: I beg your grace not to do this.
He's at fault, and the king will punish him.
The stocks are for thieves and other wretches.

CORNWALL: I'll answer for that.

REGAN: My sister might not like to hear
That her servant Oswald was so abused
For carrying out her business. Put his legs in.

(Kent is put in the stocks.)

CORNWALL: Let's go, my lord.

(All but Gloucester and Kent exit.)

GLOUCESTER: I'm sorry for you, friend.

It's the duke's whim. Everyone knows
How stubborn he is. I'll plead for you.

KENT: Please do not, sir. Some of the time
I'll sleep, and the rest I'll whistle.
Even a good man sometimes has bad luck.
Good day to you!

GLOUCESTER: The duke's at fault for this.
It will be taken badly.

(Gloucester exits.)

KENT: I know that Cordelia's been told about
My disguise. She will find the best time to
Set things right in this monstrous state.
Do not look, heavy eyes, upon these
Shameful stocks. Good night, Fortune! Smile
Once more, and then turn your wheel!

(He sleeps.)

Scene 3

The open country. Edgar enters, talking to himself.

EDGAR: Hearing myself called an outlaw,
I escaped the hunt in this hollow tree.
No seaport is free. Every place is

Tightly guarded to trap me.
While I can still escape, I'll disguise myself.
I'll cover my face with filth,
Wear rags, and mat all my hair in knots.
This country is full of lunatic beggars with
Roaring voices, who stick pins, skewers,
And nails into their bare arms. Then they beg
From humble farms and poor villages,
Using lunatic curses and prayers.
(*He speaks like a mad beggar.*) Poor Tom!
(*in his normal voice*) That's what's left for me.
As Edgar, I'm nothing.

(*Edgar exits.*)

Scene 4

Before Gloucester's castle. Kent is in the stocks. Lear and the fool enter.

LEAR: It's strange that they should leave home
Like that and not send back my messenger.

GENTLEMAN: I heard their leaving was sudden.

KENT: Greetings, noble master!

LEAR: What, is this sort of shame your hobby?

KENT: No, my lord.

LEAR: Who put you here?

KENT: Two people—your son and your daughter.

LEAR: They wouldn't. They *couldn't*! It's worse
Than murder to do such an outrage
Against an officer of the king.

KENT: My lord, when I gave your letters to them
Another messenger arrived at their home.
He was half breathless, panting greetings from
His mistress Goneril. He delivered letters
Which they read at once.
After that, they summoned their servants
And immediately took to their horses.
They commanded me to follow and wait for a
Reply at their leisure. They gave me cold looks.
I met the other messenger here. I realized that
His welcome had poisoned mine.
He was the same fellow who had recently been
So disrespectful to your highness.
Having more courage than sense,
I drew my sword. He called out
With loud and cowardly cries.
Your son and daughter found this action
Worth the shame I'm now suffering.

LEAR: Oh, how sorrow swells my heart!
Where is this daughter?

KENT: With the duke, sir, indoors.

LEAR: I will go speak to her.

(Lear exits.)

FOOL: You could learn a lesson from the ant—
there's nothing to be gained from working

for a lost cause. Don't hold on to a huge wheel that's running down a hill—you might break your neck trying to keep up with it. When a wise man gives you better advice, return mine.

(Lear enters again, with Gloucester.)

LEAR: Refused to speak with me! They say they
Are weary and sick?
They have traveled all night? Mere excuses—
The symbols of revolt and desertion.
Bring me a better answer.

GLOUCESTER: My dear lord,
You know how stubborn the Duke is.

LEAR: Stubborn? Why, Gloucester, I want to
Speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER: Well, my good lord, I have
informed them so.

LEAR: “Informed” them! Do you understand me?

GLOUCESTER: Yes, my good lord.

LEAR: The king wishes to speak with Cornwall.
The dear father wishes to speak with his
Daughter. I command her obedience.
Have they both been informed of this?
My breath and blood!
(looking at Kent in the stocks and getting angrier)
Death to my royal power!
Why should he sit here?

I want my servant out of the stocks!
Go tell the duke and his wife that I demand
To speak with them now!

(Gloucester exits.)

LEAR: Oh, me! My heart is rising! But, down!

FOOL: Give it its orders, uncle, as the cook did to
the eels when she put them in the pan alive.
She hit them with a stick and cried,
“Down, you creatures, *down!*”

**(Cornwall, Regan, Gloucester, and servants enter. Kent
is set free.)**

REGAN: I am glad to see your highness.

LEAR: Regan, I know you are.

(to Kent) Oh, are you free? We'll discuss this
Some other time. **(Kent leaves.)**

Beloved Regan, your sister is wicked.
Her sharp-toothed unkindness has eaten
At my heart like a vulture. Oh, Regan!

REGAN: I beg you, sir, be patient. I cannot believe
My sister would fail in her obligation to you.
If she has calmed the riotous actions of your
Followers, she should be praised, not blamed.

LEAR: My curses on her!

REGAN: Oh, sir, you are old and close to the end
of your life.
You should be led by someone wise
who knows you

Better than you know yourself.
Therefore, I beg you, return to our sister.
Say you have wronged her, sir.

LEAR: Ask her forgiveness?

See how this looks for royalty! (*He kneels.*)
“Dear Daughter, I confess that I am old.
Age is a nuisance. On my knees I beg
That you’ll give me clothing, a bed, and food.”

REGAN: Good sir, no more of this!

These are ugly tricks. Return to my sister.

LEAR (*rising*): Never, Regan!

She has deprived me of half my retinue,
Given me dark looks, and spoken rudely.
May the gods strike her bones with lameness!

REGAN: Oh, the gods! Will you curse me, too,
When you’re in a bad mood?

LEAR: No, Regan, you shall never have my curse.
Your tender nature would never turn harsh.
Her eyes are fierce, but yours are warm.
It is not in you to begrudge me my pleasures.
You know how to be grateful.
You haven’t forgotten the half of the kingdom
That I gave to you.

REGAN: Good sir, get to the point.

LEAR: Who put my man in the stocks?

(*A trumpet sounds.*)

CORNWALL: Whose trumpet is that?

REGAN: It is my sister's. She said in her letter
That she would be here soon.

(Oswald enters.)

Has your lady arrived?

LEAR *(frowning at Oswald):* This is the wretch who
Put my servant in the stocks! Regan,
I trust you did not know about it.

(Goneril approaches.)

Who's that? Oh, heavens!

If you love old men, help me now!

(to Goneril) Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

(The sisters embrace.) Oh, Regan, will you hold
her hand?

GONERIL: Why not my hand, sir? How have I
offended you?

LEAR *(holding his heart):* Is there no end to this?
(to Cornwall) Why was my man in the stocks?

CORNWALL: I put him there, sir.
His own conduct deserved worse.

LEAR: *You!* Did you?

REGAN: Father, being weak, act accordingly.
Return and stay with my sister for the rest of
The month—dismissing half your guards—
And then come to me.

LEAR: Return to her, and dismiss 50 men?
No, I would rather reject all shelter and fight
The elements, be friends with wolves and owls.

Return with her? Why, I could just as easily
Kneel at France's throne and,
Like a poor squire, beg for a pension to live on!
Return with her? Ask me rather to be a slave
To this hated servant. (*He points to Oswald.*)

GONERIL: It's your choice, sir.

LEAR: I beg you, daughter, do not make me mad.
I will not trouble you, my child. Farewell.
We'll meet no more, see each other no more.
But still you are my flesh and blood,
Or rather a disease in my flesh, like a boil,
A plague sore, a swollen tumor in my blood!
But I'll not scold you. Shame will come to
you in its own time.
I can be patient. I can stay with Regan—
I and my 100 knights.

REGAN: Not quite. I wasn't expecting you yet,
And I am not prepared for a fitting welcome.
Listen to my sister. She's right.

LEAR: Are you sure?

REGAN: Absolutely, sir. What, 50 followers?
Isn't that enough? Why should you need more?
How can so many people live in one house,
Under two commands, and get along?

GONERIL: Why couldn't you, my lord, be served
By her servants, or by mine?

REGAN: Why not, my lord? If they neglected you,
We could correct them. If you come to me,

I would ask you to bring only 25.
I'll take care of no more than that.

LEAR: What? I gave you everything—

REGAN: And you took your time about it!

LEAR: —but on the condition that I should have
100 knights in my retinue. What?
Must I come to you with 25? Regan,
Is that what you said?

REGAN: And I say it again. No more with me.

LEAR: Some wicked creatures look good
Compared to others who are more wicked.
(*to Goneril*) I'll go with you. Your 50
Is double her 25, so your love is double hers.

GONERIL: Hear me, my lord, why do you need
25, 10, or even 5 to serve you in a house
Where twice as many are at your service?

REGAN: What need do you have of one?

LEAR: Don't talk about need.
Even the poorest beggars
Have something they could do without.
If you allow no more than one needs,
Our lives would be no better than a beast's.
If you dressed only for warmth,
You'd not need those pretty clothes
That scarcely keep you warm. Heavens!
Give me the patience that I need!
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,

As full of grief as age, and wretched in both!
Oh, fool, I shall go mad!

(Lear exits, followed by Gloucester, the gentleman, and the fool. A storm is heard in the distance.)

CORNWALL: Let's go in. A storm is coming.

REGAN: This house is too little for the old man
and his people.

GONERIL: It's his own fault. He's upset himself,
So he must suffer for his own foolishness.

REGAN: By himself, I'll receive him gladly.
But not one follower.

GONERIL: I feel the same way.

(Gloucester enters again.)

GLOUCESTER: The king is in a terrible rage.

GONERIL: My lord, by no means beg him to stay.

GLOUCESTER: But night's coming, and it's stormy.

REGAN: Willful men learn from their own errors.
Shut your doors. His followers are desperate.
Who knows what they'll provoke him to do?

CORNWALL: Shut your doors. It's a wild night.
Regan's right. Come out of the storm.

(All exit.)

ACT 3

Scene 1

*A heath during a storm. Thunder and lightning. **Kent** and a **gentleman** enter.*

KENT: Where's the king?

GENTLEMAN: Dealing with the angry elements.

He tells the wind to blow the earth into the sea,
Or raise the waves over the mainland. He tears
His white hair, which the wind whips about.
He tries to out-storm the wind and rain.

Tonight—when even bears, lions, and wolves
Take cover from the storm—he runs
bareheaded

And cries out desperately.

KENT: But who is with him?

GENTLEMAN: Only the fool.

KENT: Sir, I'll tell you something important.

Although they hide it, a division exists
Between Albany and Cornwall.

They have servants who seem loyal, but
Who are actually spies for the King of France.
These servants supply information about the
dukes' quarrels and the shameful way they
Have treated the kind old king. The truth is
That an army has come from France

To this divided kingdom. They have already
Arrived secretly at some of our best ports.
If you hurry to Dover, you shall find
 men there
Who will thank you for a true report of
The king's unnatural and maddening sorrow.
I am a gentleman of noble blood and breeding,
And I tell you this on reliable information.
To prove that I am more than I appear to be,
Open this purse and take what is in it.
When you see Cordelia, show her this ring.
She will tell you who I am.
Damn this storm! Let's go find the king.
You go that way, and I'll go this.
Whoever sees him first, holler to the other.

(Both exit.)

Scene 2

*Another part of the heath. Storm continues. **Lear** and the
fool enter.*

LEAR: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!

Rage! Blow! You blasts of lightning,
Singe my white head!

FOOL: Oh, uncle, flattery in a dry house

Is better than this rain outside! Go in—

And ask for a blessing from your daughters.

This night pities neither wise men nor fools.



LEAR: Spit, fire! Spout, rain! Rain, wind,
Thunder, fire—they're not my daughters!
I do not accuse you elements of unkindness.
I never gave you a kingdom or called you
children.
You owe me nothing. So do as you will!

(Kent enters, in disguise.)

KENT: Alas, sir, are you here? Even creatures
That love night do not love nights like these.
The angry skies frighten even the wildest
animals
And make them stay in their caves.
I've never seen such a storm!

LEAR: Let the great gods, who are making

This dreadful noise over our heads,
Identify their enemies now.
(He removes his hat to show he has nothing to fear.)
I am a man more sinned against than sinning.

KENT: Alas, bareheaded!

My gracious lord, a nearby shed will
give you some shelter from the storm.
I will return to your cruel house and force
Its hardhearted occupants to be courteous.

LEAR: Where is this shed, my fellow?

Need is a strange thing. It can make lowly
Things precious. Lead on, to the shed.

(They exit.)

Scene 3

A room in Gloucester's castle. Gloucester and Edmund enter, carrying torches.

GLOUCESTER: This behavior is unnatural!

They've ordered me never to speak of him,
plead for him, or in any way help him.

EDMUND: Most savage and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER: *Sh!* Say nothing. The dukes have
quarreled. And here's something worse:
I received a letter tonight. It's dangerous to
speak of it. I have locked the letter in my
bedroom. These wrongs the king has

suffered will be avenged in full. Part of an army has already landed. We must take the king's side. I will find him and secretly help him. Keep the duke talking, Edmund, so he won't notice I'm gone. If he asks for me, say I am sick in bed. Even if I die for it, I must help the king. Strange things are sure to happen. Please be careful, Edmund.

(Gloucester goes to look for Lear.)

EDMUND: I'll tell the duke about this—
And about that letter, too. I will gain
What my father loses—no less than all!
The young rise when the old fall.

(Edmund exits.)

Scene 4

The heath, in front of the shed. The storm continues. Lear, Kent (still disguised), and the fool enter.

KENT: Here is the place, my lord. Enter.

LEAR: You think it matters that this storm
Soaks us to the skin. So it does, to *you*.
But where there is greater suffering,
 lesser suffering is hardly felt.
The storm in my mind
Takes all feeling from my senses

Except what's tormenting me—
The ingratitude of my daughters!
It's as if my mouth would bite my hand
For lifting food to it. I'll punish thoroughly!
But, I will weep no more.
To shut me out on a night like this!
(*to the storm*) Pour on—I can take it!
Oh, Regan! Goneril! Your kind old father,
Whose open heart gave you everything!

KENT: My good lord, enter here.

LEAR (*to the fool*): In, boy. You go first.
I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.

(*The fool goes in.*)

EDGAR (*from inside the shed, pretending to be insane*):
Poor Tom! Poor Tom!

(*The fool runs out.*)

FOOL: Don't go there, uncle. There's a ghost!
He says his name's Poor Tom.

KENT: Who are you in the shed? Come out.

(*Edgar appears, disguised as a madman.*)

EDGAR: Go away! The foul fiend follows me!

LEAR: Did you give everything to your daughters?

EDGAR: Who gives anything to poor Tom?
The foul fiend leads him through fire
and swamps. He's put knives under
his pillow and poison by his soup.

(He swipes at an imaginary attacker.) I could catch him now—and there—and there again!

(The storm rages on.)

LEAR: Have his daughters brought him to this?
Could you save nothing? Did you give them all?

FOOL: He saved a blanket, which is all he wears.

LEAR: May all the plagues that hang in the air
Land on your daughters!

KENT: He has no daughters, sir.

LEAR: Nothing could have brought him
To such lowness but his unkind daughters!
Is it the fashion now for discarded fathers
To endure such sufferings of the flesh?
How just the punishment!
It was this very flesh
That conceived those father-killing daughters!

FOOL: This cold night will turn us all to
fools and madmen. *(He sees Gloucester approaching, carrying a torch.)* Look, here comes
a walking fire!

LEAR *(peering in the dark):* Who are you?

GLOUCESTER: My lord, I am here to help.
Come with me. My sense of duty
Forbids me to obey your daughters'
Harsh commands. Their order is
To bar my doors, and let this pitiless night

Take its hold on you. But I have come to
Bring you to where fire and food are ready.

KENT: Ask him again,
My lord. His mind is failing.

GLOUCESTER: Can you blame him?
His daughters want him dead.
Ah, that good Kent! He said it would be thus.
The poor, banished man!
You say the king grows mad. I'll tell you,
Friend, I am almost mad myself. I had a son,
Now disowned. He sought my life,
Only recently! I loved him, friend—
No father loved a son more. In truth,
The grief has driven me almost crazy.
(*The storm rages.*) What a night this is!
(*to Lear*) I do beg your grace—

EDGAR: Tom's so cold.

GLOUCESTER: In, fellow, into the shed! Get warm.

LEAR: Come. Let's all go in.

(*They all enter the shed.*)

Scene 5

A room in Gloucester's castle. Cornwall and Edmund enter. Cornwall is waving a letter.

CORNWALL: I see now that it was not just your
brother's evil nature that made him seek

your father's death. He was provoked into it by your father's treason.

EDMUND: Here's the letter my father mentioned. It proves him to be acting on behalf of France. Oh, heavens! If only this treason had never happened—or that I wasn't the one to discover it! If the contents of this letter are true, you have important business to do.

CORNWALL (*having read the letter*): True or false, it has made you the Earl of Gloucester. Find your father, so we may arrest him.

EDMUND (*aside*): If I find my father helping the king, it will make the duke even more suspicious. (*aloud*) I will continue to be loyal, though it conflicts with my feelings as a son.

CORNWALL: I will trust in you, and I promise that you shall find a more loving father in me.

(*They exit.*)

Scene 6

A room in a farmhouse near the castle. Gloucester and Kent (disguised) enter.

GLOUCESTER: This is better than the open air. Let's try to make it more comfortable yet. I won't be away for long.

KENT: His mind is completely gone under the stress. May the gods reward your kindness!

(Gloucester exits. Edgar, the fool, and Lear enter.)

LEAR: I will punish those ungrateful daughters!

(to Edgar) Come, sit here. You're a judge.

(to the fool) You, wise sir, sit here. You're another judge.

(to Kent) And you—sit down, too.

(rubbing his hands) Now, you she-foxes!

EDGAR *(pointing to Lear):* Look how he glares!

KENT: How are you, sir? Don't be dismayed.

Won't you lie down and rest on these cushions?

LEAR: I'll see their trial first. Bring the witnesses.

EDGAR: Let us have a fair trial.

LEAR *(pointing to an empty seat):* Prosecute her first.

It's Goneril. I say under my oath before this honorable assembly that she kicked the king, her poor father.

FOOL: Come here. Is your name Goneril?

LEAR: She cannot deny it.

FOOL: I'm sorry. I mistook you for a stool!

LEAR: And here's another one, whose ugly looks

Reveal what her heart is made of.

(He jumps up excitedly.) Stop her there!

(to Edgar) False judge! You let her escape!

KENT: Oh, for pity! Sir, where is the self-control
You have so often claimed to have?

EDGAR (*aside, as himself*): My tears of sympathy
For him are going to ruin my disguise.

LEAR: The little dogs—see, they bark at me.
Let them dissect Regan. See what festers
about her heart. Is there any cause in
nature that makes their hearts so hard?

KENT: Now, my lord, lie here and rest awhile.

LEAR (*as if at home in bed*): Make no noise. Draw the
curtains. We'll go to supper in the morning.

(*Gloucester enters again.*)

GLOUCESTER (*to Kent*): Where is the king?

KENT: Don't bother him, sir. His mind is gone.

GLOUCESTER: Good friend, I beg of you,
Take him in your arms. I have overheard
A plot to kill him. There's a stretcher ready.
Lay him on it, and take him to Dover.
There you'll be welcomed and protected.

KENT: Stress has worn him out, and he sleeps.
(*to the fool*) Come, help me carry him.

GLOUCESTER: Come, come away!

(*Kent, Gloucester, and the fool carry Lear out.*)

EDGAR: When we see our betters suffering,
Our own miseries are easier to bear.
He suffers from his children,
As I do from my father! Tom, away!
Throw off your disguise when you are cleared
Of the false charges that shame you.

Whatever else happens tonight,
May the king escape safely!
Until then, stay in hiding.

(Edgar exits.)

Scene 7

A room in Gloucester's castle. Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, Edmund, and servants enter.

CORNWALL *(to Goneril)*: Send a messenger with
this letter to my lord, your husband.
France's army has landed. Find the
traitor Gloucester!

(Some servants leave.)

REGAN: Hang him instantly!

GONERIL: Pluck out his eyes!

CORNWALL: Leave him to my displeasure.
Edmund, stay with Goneril. The revenge
we are planning to take on your traitorous
father is not fit for you to behold. Tell the
duke, when you see him, to prepare for war.
We'll do the same.

(Oswald enters.)

Well, where's the king?

OSWALD: My Lord of Gloucester
Has taken him away. Some 30 of his knights

And several of Lord Gloucester's men
Met him at the gate. They all went to Dover,
Where they claim to have well-armed friends.

CORNWALL: Get horses for your mistress.

GONERIL: Farewell, sweet lord, and sister.

CORNWALL: Edmund, farewell.

(Goneril, Edmund, and Oswald leave.)

Go and find the traitor Gloucester.
Tie him up like a thief, and bring him to us.

(Other servants exit.)

Though we cannot condemn him to death
Without a trial, we can indulge our anger.
Anger may be blamed but not controlled.
Who's there? The traitor?

(Servants enter with Gloucester as their prisoner.)

REGAN: The ungrateful fox! Here he is!

CORNWALL: Tie his withered arms tight!

GLOUCESTER: What do your graces mean?

My good friends, remember you are my guests.
Do me no harm, friends.

CORNWALL: Tie him, I say!

(Servants tie him up.)

REGAN: Tight! Tight! Oh, you filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER: Merciless lady, I'm *not*!

CORNWALL: Tie him to this chair. What letter

Have you recently received from France?

REGAN: A straight answer, for we know the truth.

GLOUCESTER: I received a vague letter from
A neutral source, not from an enemy.

CORNWALL: Where have you sent the king?

GLOUCESTER: To Dover.

REGAN: Why to Dover?

GLOUCESTER: I couldn't watch your cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes or your sister's
Boarish fangs slash his anointed flesh.
In such a storm as he endured, poor old
heart, he helped the heavens rage.
If wolves had howled at your gate just then,
You would have said, "Let them in."
All other cruel creatures give in to compassion.
But I shall see that divine revenge
Comes down on such children as you!

CORNWALL: You shall never see it.

(to the servants) You fellows, hold the chair.
I'll set my foot upon those eyes of yours!

*(Gloucester is held down in his chair, while Cornwall
blinds one of his eyes with his boot.)*

GLOUCESTER: Help! Oh, cruel! Oh, gods!

REGAN: One side will mock the other.
Get the other eye, too!

FIRST SERVANT: Stop, my lord!

I have served you ever since I was a child.

But I've never served you better than I do now
When I tell you to stop!

REGAN: What, you dog!

CORNWALL: You villain!

(He draws his sword and attacks the servant.)

FIRST SERVANT: Right, then, come on! Take your
chance against an angry man!

(He draws. They fight, and Cornwall is wounded.)

REGAN (to another servant): Give me your sword.
A peasant dares to stand up like this?

(She runs the servant through from behind.)

FIRST SERVANT: Oh, I am killed! My lord,
You have one eye left to see some harm
Come to him! Oh! *(He dies.)*

CORNWALL: In case it should see more,
I will prevent it.

(He tears out Gloucester's other eye.)

Out, you vile piece of jelly!
Where's your luster now?

GLoucester: All is dark and comfortless.
Where is my son? Edmund! Call all the
Sparks of nature to revenge this horrid act!

REGAN: Out, you treacherous villain!
You are calling on one who hates you.
It was he who told us of your treasons.

GLOUCESTER: Oh, my follies! Then Edgar
Was wronged. Kind gods, forgive me for that!

REGAN *(to a servant)*: Go throw him out the gate,
And let him smell his way to Dover.
(to Cornwall) How are you, my lord?

CORNWALL: I am hurt. Follow me, lady.
Turn that eyeless villain out.
And throw his dead servant on the dunghill.
Regan, I'm bleeding badly. This wound is
untimely. Give me your arm.

*(Cornwall exits, led by Regan. Servants untie Gloucester
and lead him away. Other servants carry the dead
servant out.)*

SECOND SERVANT: If she has a long life
And in the end dies a natural death,
All women will turn into monsters!

THIRD SERVANT: Let's follow the old duke and
Get the madman to lead him wherever
He wants to go. No one will question
What a madman does.

SECOND SERVANT: You go. I'll fetch some medicine
For his bleeding face. Now, heaven help him!

(They exit, in different directions.)

ACT 4

Scene 1

*The heath. **Edgar** enters, still disguised as a madman.*

EDGAR: It's better like this—openly despised—
Than to be secretly despised but fooled
by flattery.
When things are worst, however,
they can only get better.
But who comes here?

*(**Gloucester** enters, led by an **old man**.)*

My father, led by a peasant? World, oh, world!
It's hatred of your strange changes that
Helps us accept death.

OLD MAN *(to Gloucester)*: Oh, my good lord,
I've lived on your land for 80 years.

GLOUCESTER: Get away! Good friend, be gone.
Your help can do me no good,
And it may hurt you.

OLD MAN: You cannot see your way.

GLOUCESTER: I have no way, so I need no eyes.
I stumbled when I could see. Very often,
Our misfortunes prove to be assets.
Oh, dear son Edgar, the object of your
Foolish father's anger! If I could only live

To see you by touching you,
I'd say I had eyes again!

OLD MAN (*noticing Edgar*): It's poor mad Tom, the
beggar.

GLOUCESTER: He must have some sense,
Or else he could not beg.

EDGAR (*aside*): What's happened to my father?
(*aloud*) Bless you, master!

GLOUCESTER: Is that the madman?

OLD MAN: Beggar and madman, too, my lord.

GLOUCESTER: Then, please go now, for
Your own safety. I'll ask this man to lead me.

OLD MAN: Alas, sir, he is mad.

GLOUCESTER: It's a sign of the sick times
When madmen lead the blind.
Do as I say. Go!

(*Old man exits.*)

GLOUCESTER: You, there! Hello!

EDGAR: Poor Tom's so cold.

(*aside*) I cannot keep this up, but I must!

(*aloud*) Bless your sweet eyes, they bleed.

GLOUCESTER: Do you know the way to Dover?

EDGAR: Yes, master.

GLOUCESTER: There is a cliff, whose great height
Looks fearfully into the pounding sea below.
Bring me to the edge of it. I'll reward you well.

From that place I shall need no leading.

EDGAR: Here is my arm. Poor Tom shall lead you.

(They exit.)

Scene 2

Near the Duke of Albany's palace. Goneril and Edmund enter, having traveled together from Gloucester's castle.

GONERIL: Welcome, my lord. I'm amazed that
My husband did not meet us on the way.

(Oswald enters.)

Where's your master?

OSWALD: Inside, madam. But never was a man
So changed. I told him the army had landed.
He smiled at it. When I told him you were
coming, he said, "So much the worse."
Then I told him of Gloucester's treachery,
And of the loyal service of his son.
He called me an idiot and said I'd got it
The wrong way around!

GONERIL (to Edmund): You should go back.
He's too cowardly to take any action.
Go back, Edmund, to my brother-in-law.
Lead his army. I must change roles at home,
And give my husband the sewing to do!
(pointing to Oswald) This trusty servant shall be
Our go-between. Soon you might hear—

If you act for your own benefit—
A certain command from your mistress.
(*She kisses him.*) This kiss, if it dared to speak,
Would raise your spirits up into the air.
Understand me, and farewell.

EDMUND: Yours always, till death!

GONERIL: My dearest Edmund!

(*Edmund exits.*)

Oh, the difference from man to man!
You deserve what a woman has to give,
And I am married to a fool.

OSWALD: Madam, here comes my lord.

(*Oswald exits. Albany enters.*)

GONERIL: Wasn't it worth it to come meet me?

ALBANY: Oh, Goneril! You are not worth the dust
the rude wind blows in your face!
I fear your character. A nature that can deny
Its parent cannot control itself.

GONERIL: Say no more. Your sermon is foolish.

ALBANY: Wisdom and goodness seem vile
To the vile. To the filthy, filth is attractive.
You have driven your gracious father mad.
How could my brother-in-law allow it?

GONERIL: Coward! Everyone pushes you around.
Where's your call to arms? The King of France
Raises his flags in our peaceful land.
The threat of war is all around us—

while you, a moral fool,
Sit still and cry, “Why is he doing this?”

ALBANY: See yourself for what you are—a devil!
Evil is even more horrid in a woman.

GONERIL: You worthless fool!

ALBANY: For shame! Don’t act like a monster!
If I would let my hands follow my emotions,
I would tear your flesh and bones.
But your woman’s shape protects you.

GONERIL (*sneering*): You and your manhood!

(*A messenger enters.*)

ALBANY: What news do you have?

MESSENGER: Oh, my good lord,
The Duke of Cornwall is dead!
He was slain by his servant as he was
Putting out the other eye of Gloucester.

ALBANY: Gloucester’s eyes!

MESSENGER: A servant, filled with compassion,
Defended him, raising his sword
To his great master. The duke, enraged,
Attacked him, and the servant fell dead—
But not before giving the duke a mortal
wound that later took his life.
(*to Goneril*) This letter, madam, is from your
sister.

GONERIL (*aside*): She being a widow
And my Edmund being with her,

All my dreams for the future might dissolve.
(*aloud*) I'll read it and answer it.

(*Goneril exits.*)

ALBANY: Where was his son when they
took his eyes?

MESSENGER: On his way here with my lady.

ALBANY: He is not here.

MESSENGER: No, sir. I met him on his way back.

ALBANY: Does he know about the wickedness?

MESSENGER: Yes, my good lord. He was the one
Who informed against his father.
He left the house on purpose so
They would feel free to punish him.

ALBANY: Gloucester, I live to thank you
For the love you showed the king—
And to avenge your eyes!
(*to the messenger*) Come here, friend.
Tell me all you know.

(*They exit.*)

Scene 3

The French camp near Dover. Kent and a gentleman enter.

KENT: Why has the King of France left so soon?

GENTLEMAN: He remembered something he'd
forgotten to do in his own kingdom.

KENT: What general has he left in charge?

GENTLEMAN: The Marshal of France.

KENT: Did your letters move Cordelia to any show of grief?

GENTLEMAN: Yes, sir. As she read them,
Tears trickled down her delicate cheek.
Once or twice she gasped "Father!"
As if it pressed upon her heart. She cried,
"Sisters, sisters! Disgrace to all women!
What—in the storm? It's unbelievable!"
Then she shook the holy tears
From her heavenly eyes.

KENT: It is the stars, the stars above us,
That determine our characters! Otherwise,
Parents could not beget such different
children.
Have you spoken with her since?

GENTLEMAN: No.

KENT: Was this before the king returned to France?

GENTLEMAN: No, after.

KENT: Well, the poor distressed Lear is here.
Sometimes, in his clearer moments, he knows
Why we are here, and refuses to see Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN: Why, good sir?

KENT: An overpowering shame pushes him away.
He remembers his own unkindness to her.

GENTLEMAN: Alas, the poor gentleman!

KENT: What have you heard about Albany's and Cornwall's armies?

GENTLEMAN: They are on the march.

KENT: Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master,
Lear,
And leave you to look after him.
Important business will keep me busy awhile.
When I resume my real name, you won't
Be sorry for your association with me.
Please, come with me now.

(They exit.)

Scene 4

A tent in the French camp. Cordelia, a doctor, and soldiers enter.

CORDELIA: Alas, it's he. He was seen just now
As mad as the raging sea, singing aloud.
He wore a crown of common weeds.
Find him, and bring him to our sight.

(An officer leaves.)

Whoever can cure him
May have all my possessions.

DOCTOR: There is a way, madam. Sleep,
Which he lacks, is how nature cares for us.
There are many herbs whose power
Will close the eye of his anguish.

CORDELIA: May all the remedies of the earth
Be watered with my tears!

(A messenger enters.)

MESSENGER: The British army is approaching.

CORDELIA: We know that. We're ready for them.
Oh, dear father! We are fighting for your
interests. That's why my husband,
the King of France,
Has pitied my mournful tears.
We are not pushed by ambition, but by
Love, dear love, and our aged father's rights.
May I soon hear and see him!

(All exit.)

Scene 5

A room in Gloucester's castle. Regan and Oswald enter.

REGAN: Have my brother-in-law's troops set out?

OSWALD: Yes, madam.

REGAN: Is he with them?

OSWALD: Madam, after much fuss.

Your sister is the better soldier.

REGAN: Did Lord Edmund speak with your lord
at his home?

OSWALD: No, madam.

REGAN: Why did my sister write to him?

OSWALD: I don't know, lady.

REGAN: Indeed, he has left on a serious matter.

It was stupid to let Gloucester live
After we blinded him. Where he goes,
He turns all hearts against us. Edmund,
I think, has gone to end his father's darkened
life

Out of pity for his misery. He also wants
To discover the strength of the enemy.

OSWALD: I must go after him with this letter.

My lady gave me strict commands about this.

REGAN: Why should she write to Edmund?

Couldn't you give her message by mouth?
Perhaps—I don't know—

I'd really appreciate it—let me open the letter.

OSWALD: Madam, I'd rather—

REGAN: I know she does not love her husband.

I am sure of that. When she was here recently,
She gave loving glances and meaningful looks
To noble Edmund. I know you are close to her.
So listen to this: Edmund and I have talked.
He is more interested in me than in your lady.
You know what I'm saying. Give him this.

(She hands Oswald a letter.)

And when you tell your lady everything

I've told you,

Please advise her to act wisely. So, farewell.
If you do happen to hear of that blind traitor,
There's a promotion for whoever ends his life.

OSWALD: I hope I meet him, madam!

I'll show where my loyalty lies.

REGAN: Farewell.

(Both exit.)

Scene 6

The countryside near Dover. Gloucester enters, led by Edgar.

GLOUCESTER: How far to the top of that hill?

EDGAR: You're climbing up to it now.

GLOUCESTER: The ground seems level to me.

EDGAR: It's horribly steep. Do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER: No, I don't. And I think that
Your voice is changed. You speak more
Clearly than you did before.

EDGAR: You are wrong. I am the same.

GLOUCESTER: No, I think you're better spoken.

EDGAR: Come on, sir. Here's the place. Stand still.
(They're in a field, but Edgar pretends it's a cliff.)

It makes me dizzy to look down!

The fishermen walking on the beach look
As small as mice. I'll look no more,
In case it turns my head. Blurred sight
Might make me topple down headfirst.

GLOUCESTER: Put me where you are standing.

EDGAR: Give me your hand. You are now within
A foot of the extreme edge.

GLOUCESTER: Release my hand. Here, friend,
Is another purse. It holds a valuable jewel.
May good luck help you enjoy it!
Say goodbye, and let me hear you leave.

EDGAR (*pretending to go*): Goodbye, good sir.
(*aside*) The only reason I toy with his
Despair like this is to cure it.

GLOUCESTER (*kneeling*): Oh, you mighty gods!
I renounce this world and my great pain.
If I could bear it longer, I would.
If Edgar is alive, oh, bless him!
(*to Edgar*) Now, fellow, farewell!
(*He throws himself forward, as if over a cliff.*)

EDGAR (*pretending to be far off*): Gone, sir. Farewell.
(*now pretending to be a fisherman at the foot
of the cliff*) Hello, sir! Friend!
Do you hear me? Speak!
Who are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER: Go away, and let me die.

EDGAR: You have fallen more than the height
Of 10 ships' masts! It's a miracle you're alive!

GLOUCESTER: Have I fallen, or not?

EDGAR: Yes—from the top of this chalky cliff.
Look right up there. Just look up!

GLOUCESTER: Alas, I have no eyes.

EDGAR: Give me your arm. I'll help you up.
How are you? Can you feel your legs?
It is clear that the gods have saved your life.

GLOUCESTER: From now on, I'll bear suffering
Till it decides I've had enough—and then die.

EDGAR: Be patient. But who comes here?

(Lear enters, fantastically dressed up with flowers.)

No sane person would dress like that.
What a heartbreaking sight!

LEAR: Look, look, a mouse! Here, this piece
of toasted cheese will catch it. *(He tears off
an imaginary chunk and throws it to the ground.
Then he follows an imaginary arrow in its flight.)*
Oh, well-flown, bird! A bull's eye!
(seeing Edgar) Give the password.

EDGAR: Sweet marjoram.

LEAR: You may pass.

GLOUCESTER: I know you. Are you the king?

LEAR: Yes, every inch a king!

GLOUCESTER: Oh, let me kiss that hand!

LEAR: I must wipe it first. It smells of death.

GLOUCESTER: Oh, what a ruin of a man!
Do you know me?

LEAR: I remember your eyes well enough.
Are you squinting at me?

GLOUCESTER: What, with holes for eyes?

LEAR: Oh, ho, is that your game? No eyes in your head. Sad for your eyes. But that's the way of the world, you see.

GLOUCESTER: I see by the feel of things.

LEAR: What, are you mad? A man may see how
The world goes with no eyes. Use your ears.
If you want to weep for my misfortunes,
Take my eyes. I know you well enough.
You are Gloucester. I'll preach to you—listen!

GLOUCESTER: Alas, alas the day!

LEAR: When we're born, we cry that
We have come to this great stage of fools.
(In his madness, he loses his train of thought.)
It would be a good idea to shoe a troop
Of horses with felt. I must try it.
And when I've crept up on these sons-in-law,
Then kill, kill, kill, kill!

(A gentleman enters, with attendants.)

GENTLEMAN: Oh, here he is. Take hold of him.

LEAR: I am a king. Do you realize that?

GENTLEMAN: You are a royal one. We obey you.

LEAR: Then there's still hope. Come, if you
want it, you'll have to run for it!

(He runs off. The attendants run after him.)

GENTLEMAN: A pitiful sight even for the lowest
wretch! When it's a king, it's beyond words!

EDGAR: Have you heard of a coming battle?

GENTLEMAN: Of course. Everyone has.

EDGAR: How close is the other army?

GENTLEMAN: Very near, and approaching fast.

EDGAR: Thank you, sir. That's all.

(Gentleman exits.)

GLOUCESTER: Now, good sir, who are you?

EDGAR: A very poor man, broken by misfortune.

Give me your hand. I'll lead you to shelter.

GLOUCESTER: Hearty thanks.

(Oswald enters, and sees Gloucester.)

OSWALD: A man with a price on his head! Happy day! Your eyeless head will make my fortune!

(He draws his sword.) You unhappy old traitor,
The sword is out that will destroy you.

GLOUCESTER *(ready to die):* Let your friendly hand
Be strong enough to do it.

(Edgar steps forward to defend his father.)

OSWALD: You bold peasant, how dare you
Defend an outlawed traitor? Let go his arm.

EDGAR: I'll not let go, sir, without a better reason.

OSWALD: Let go, wretch, or you'll die!

EDGAR: If I could have been cheated out
Of my life, I'd have lost it weeks ago.
Come on! I'm not afraid of your sword!

(They fight, and Edgar wounds him. Oswald falls down.)

OSWALD: Wretch, you have killed me! Villain,
Take my purse. If you ever hope to prosper,
Bury my body. Give the letter I'm carrying
To Edmund, Earl of Gloucester.
Find him on the English side.
Oh, untimely death! *(He dies.)*

EDGAR: I know you well. A true villain,
Willing to serve the vices of your mistress.

GLOUCESTER: What—is he dead?

EDGAR: Sit down, good sir, and rest.

Let's see what's in these pockets.

The letter he spoke of might be useful.

(He finds the letter and breaks the wax seal.)

I beg your pardon, gentle wax. Don't say
This is bad manners. To know what's in our
Enemies' minds, we'd rip their hearts!
It's more lawful to rip open their letters.

*(He reads.) Remember our mutual vows. You'll
have many chances to kill him. If he returns
the winner, we shall have accomplished
nothing. Then I would be his prisoner, and
his bed my jail. From this fate, please save
me, and assure yourself of my love.*

Your wife (or so I wish),

And your loving servant,

Goneril

Oh, how unlimited is woman's evil!

A plot to kill her virtuous husband,
And my brother to replace him!
(*to Oswald*) I'll show this wicked letter
To the duke. It's good that I can tell him
Of your death and your wicked business.

(*Edgar exits, dragging Oswald's body.*)

GLOUCESTER: The king is mad. How stubborn
My mind is, that I remain sane enough
To know my huge sorrows! Better I were mad
And my thoughts cut off from my griefs.

(*Drums are heard from far off.*)

EDGAR: Come now. I'll leave you with a friend.

(*Both exit.*)

Scene 7

A tent in the French camp. Lear is on a bed, asleep. Music plays. Doctor, gentleman, and others are attending Lear. Cordelia and Kent enter.

CORDELIA: Oh, good Kent! How could I ever
Repay you for your goodness?

KENT: To be appreciated, lady, is to be overpaid.

CORDELIA: Change your clothes. Those garments
Are reminders of those bad times.

KENT: Madam, to be recognized now
Goes against my plans. I ask you the favor

Of *not* knowing me till I think
the time is right.

CORDELIA: So be it, my good lord.
(*to the doctor*) How is the king?

DOCTOR: Madam, he's still sleeping. Would you
Allow us to wake him? He has slept long.

CORDELIA: Do as you think best.

DOCTOR: Be here, madam, when we wake him.
I do not doubt that he'll be normal.

CORDELIA: Very well. (*to Lear*) Oh, dear father!
May my lips bring healing, and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have done to you! (*She kisses his forehead.*)

KENT: Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA: Even if you had not been their father,
Your white hair should have merited pity.
Was this a face to fight against the storm?
To stand against the fearful thunder?
To stay in the midst of the awful lightning?
To be up at night—poor lost soul—
With this thin head-covering? My enemy's dog,
Even if he had bit me, would have had a place
In front of my fire that night. Alas, alas!
It's a wonder that your life and your sanity
Didn't end together. He is waking. Talk to him.

DOCTOR: Madam, you do so. It's best.

CORDELIA (*to Lear*): How is my royal lord?

LEAR: You do me wrong to take me

Out of the grave. You are a soul in bliss,
But I am suffering, tied to a wheel of fire.
My own tears scald me like molten lead.

CORDELIA: Sir, do you know me?

LEAR: You are a spirit, I know. When did you die?

CORDELIA (*to the doctor*): He is still confused.

DOCTOR: He's barely awake.

LEAR: Where have I been? Where am I?

CORDELIA: Give me your blessing, sir.

(*Lear sees her, and then falls at her feet.*)

No, sir, you must not kneel!

LEAR: Please do not mock me.

I am a very foolish old man, over 80 years old.
And, truthfully, I fear I'm not in my right
mind.

I think I should know you, and know this
man, too.

Yet I am doubtful. I do not even remember
Where I slept last night. Do not laugh at me.
I think this lady is my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA: And so I am. I am.

LEAR: Are your tears wet? Yes, indeed. Don't cry.
If you have poison for me, I will drink it. I
Know you do not love me. Your sisters have,
As I remember, done me wrong:
You have some cause. They have not.

CORDELIA (*weeping*): No cause, no cause.

DOCTOR: Take comfort, madam. The madness,
You see, is calmed in him. Yet it is dangerous
To fill the gaps in his memory.

Don't trouble him any more until he's calmer.

CORDELIA: Would your highness like to walk?

LEAR: You must be patient with me. Please now,
forget and forgive. I am old and foolish.

(*Lear, Cordelia, doctor, and attendants exit.*)

GENTLEMAN: Was Cornwall really killed like that?

KENT: Most certainly, sir.

GENTLEMAN: Who now commands his people?

KENT: The illegitimate son of Gloucester, it's said.

GENTLEMAN: They say Edgar, his banished son, is
with the Earl of Kent in Germany.

KENT: The stories change. We must prepare.
The armies of the kingdom approach
quickly.

GENTLEMAN: The battle is likely to be bloody.
Farewell, sir.

(*Gentleman exits.*)

KENT: My life depends on this day's battle.

(*Kent exits.*)

ACT 5

Scene 1

*The camp of the British forces near Dover. **Edmund, Regan, officers, soldiers, and others** enter.*

REGAN: Now, sweet lord,
Tell me, honestly, do you not love my sister?

EDMUND: In an honorable way.

REGAN: Have you never been intimate with her?

EDMUND: No, by my honor, madam.

REGAN: I shall never tolerate her, my lord.

Do not be familiar with her.

EDMUND: Don't worry.

(A drum sounds.)

Here she is, with her husband!

*(**Albany, Goneril, and soldiers** enter.)*

GONERIL *(aside)*: I'd rather lose the battle than
Have my sister come between him and me.

ALBANY *(bowing to Regan)*: Greetings, dear sister.

(to Edmund) Sir, I heard this:

The king has gone to his daughter, along with
Others who were forced to leave as a result
Of our harsh rule. I never liked this business.
It concerns us only because France invades us.

REGAN: Why do you bother to say this?

GONERIL: Unite against the enemy.

These family matters are not the question here.

ALBANY: Let's ask the experts how to proceed.

EDMUND: We shall meet you soon in your tent.

*(Before anyone can leave, **Edgar** enters, disguised.)*

EDGAR (to Albany): May I have a word with you?

ALBANY (to the others): I'll catch up with you.

(All but Albany and Edgar exit.)

(to Edgar) Speak.

EDGAR: Before the battle, open this letter.

If you win, let the trumpet sound.

Humble though I seem, I can produce

A champion who will prove what is said here.

If you lose, you won't care about anything,

And there all matters will end. Good luck!

ALBANY: Stay till I have read the letter.

EDGAR: I was forbidden to do so.

At the right time, just let the trumpets sound,

And I'll appear again.

ALBANY: Farewell, then. I'll read your letter.

(Edgar exits. Edmund enters again.)

EDMUND: The enemy's in view.

Bring up your troops. Act quickly now.

ALBANY: We will do our best.

(Albany exits.)

EDMUND: I have sworn my love to both
These sisters. Each is suspicious of the other.
Which of them shall I take? Both? One?
Or neither? Neither can be enjoyed
If both remain alive. To take the widow
Would make her sister Goneril very angry.
But with Goneril's husband alive,
I can hardly accomplish my plan.
So for now we'll use him for the battle.
When it's over, she who wants to be rid of
Him can decide. As for the mercy
He wants to show Lear and Cordelia,
Once the battle is done and we have them,
They shall never see his pardon. My interests
Are best served by action, not thought.

(Edmund exits.)

Scene 2

A field between the two camps. Lear and Cordelia cross the stage with some of their troops, and exit. Then Edgar and Gloucester enter.

EDGAR: Good sir, rest under this tree.
Pray that the right side wins. If I return,
I'll bring you comforting news.

GLOUCESTER: May grace go with you, sir!

(Edgar exits. The sounds of war grow louder. A retreat is sounded. Edgar enters again, dismayed.)

EDGAR: Let's go, old man! King Lear has lost.
He and his daughter have been captured.
Give me your hand. Come on!

(They exit.)

Scene 3

The British camp near Dover. Edmund enters, with Lear and Cordelia as prisoners. Soldiers guard them.

EDMUND: Guard them well until we find out
What our leaders want to do with them.

CORDELIA *(to Lear)*: We are not the first
To suffer the worst from good intentions.

LEAR: Let's be off to prison. We two, alone,
Will sing like birds in a cage. When you ask
A blessing of me, I'll kneel down and beg
Your forgiveness. So we'll live, and pray,
And sing, and tell old stories, and laugh
At the courtiers in their fancy clothes.

EDMUND: Take them away.

LEAR: The gods themselves bless such sacrifices
As yours, Cordelia. *(She cries.)* Don't cry.
Nothing can separate us now. Wipe your eyes.
They'll rot before they'll make us weep. Come!

(Lear and Cordelia exit, guarded.)

EDMUND *(to an officer)*: Come here, captain.
Take this note. Follow them to prison.

Obey these instructions and I'll reward you.
Know this: Men must take advantage
Of their opportunities. A soldier cannot be
Tenderhearted. Either say you'll do it,
Or prosper by some other means.

CAPTAIN: I can't pull a cart like a horse.
If it's man's work, I'll do it.

(He exits. Trumpets sound. Albany, Goneril, Regan, officers, and attendants enter.)

ALBANY *(to Edmund)*: I require the captives
taken in today's battle—
To do with them what they deserve.

EDMUND: Sir, I thought it best to keep them
Away from here under guard. The king's
Age and title might sway the emotions
Of the common people—and turn our own
Soldiers against us. Tomorrow, or later,
Would be a better time to hold their trial.

ALBANY: Sir, hold on. I see you as a subject
In this war—not as an equal.

REGAN *(to Albany)*: He led our troops
And acted on my authority. That's enough
To give him rank as your equal.

GONERIL: Not so fast. He merits high rank
In his own right rather than with your help.

REGAN: By acting in my name, on my authority,
He equals the best.

GONERIL: It would be so only if he married you.

REGAN: Jesters often prove to be prophets.

GONERIL (*sarcastically*): Well, well, well.

REGAN: Lady, I am not well. Otherwise,

I'd give you a piece of my mind.

(*to Edmund*) General, take my soldiers, my
prisoners,

My inheritance. Do what you want with them,

And with me. May the world witness that

I hereby create you my lord and master.

GONERIL: Do you plan to marry him?

ALBANY (*to Goneril, angrily*): It's not up to you!

EDMUND: Nor to you, lord.

ALBANY: Indeed it is!

REGAN (*to Edmund*): Let the drum sound

And proclaim that what is mine, is yours.

ALBANY: Hold on. Listen to reason! Edmund,

I arrest you for treason, and as your accomplice

(*pointing to Goneril*), this gilded serpent!

GONERIL: Such drama!

ALBANY: You are armed, Edmund.

Let the trumpet sound. If no one comes to

Prove in combat your many treasons,

I'll do it myself! There is my challenge!

(*He throws down a glove.*)

REGAN: Sick, oh, I'm sick!

GONERIL (*aside*): If not, I'll never trust poison.

EDMUND (*throwing down a glove*): My response!

He who calls me a traitor lies like a villain!
Whoever dares to approach, I will defend
My honor against him, you, or anyone else!

ALBANY (*calling*): A herald, there!

REGAN (*about to fall*): My sickness grows worse.

ALBANY: She is not well. Take her to my tent.

(*Regan exits, helped by officers. A herald enters.*)

Come here, herald. Sound the trumpet, and
read this. (*He hands him Edmund's challenge.*)

(*Herald sounds the trumpet.*)

HERALD (*reading*): *If any man of rank or distinction
in the army says that Edmund, Earl of
Gloucester, is a traitor, let him appear by the
third sound of the trumpet. He will defend
himself boldly.*

(*Trumpet sounds three times, with pauses in between.
Then Edgar comes forth, announced by more
trumpeting.*)

HERALD: Who are you to answer the call?

EDGAR: My name is not on record.

Treason has destroyed it. Yet I am as noble
As the man I come to fight.

ALBANY: Who is that man?

EDGAR: Who fights for Edmund, Earl of
Gloucester?

EDMUND (*stepping forward*): He himself.
What have you to say to him?

EDGAR: Draw your sword. Here is mine!

You are a traitor, false to your gods,
Your brother, and your father. Deny it,
And this sword, this arm, and my best spirits
Are determined to prove that you lie!

EDMUND: According to the rules of knighthood,
I could delay this fight. But I refuse to do this.
I toss your accusations of treason back at you,
Along with the hateful charge of lying.
This sword of mine will thrust them home,
Where they shall rest forever. Trumpets, speak!

(Trumpets sound. Edmund and Edgar fight. Edmund falls, badly wounded.)

ALBANY: Save him, save him!

GONERIL: This is a trick, Edmund.

By the code of arms, you were not obliged
To fight an unknown enemy.
You are not defeated, but cheated and beguiled.

ALBANY: Shut your mouth, woman, or I'll shut it
With this paper! *(It is Goneril's letter to Edmund,
which Edgar had found on Oswald in Act 4, Scene 6.)*
(to Edgar) Hold your sword, sir.
(to Goneril) You are too wicked for words!
I suspect you know what this is.
(Edmund takes the letter.)

GONERIL: What if I do? I am the queen.
The law belongs to me, not you.
Who can prosecute me for it?

ALBANY: Monster! Do you know this letter?

GONERIL: Don't ask me what I know.

(Goneril exits, upset.)

ALBANY (to an officer): Go after her. She's desperate. Take care of her. *(Officer leaves.)*

EDMUND (to Albany): What you have charged Me with, I have done—and more, much more.
Time will reveal all. It's over now, and so am I.
(to Edgar) But who are you, who have this Victory on me? If you are a noble man, I forgive you.

EDGAR: I am no less royal than you are, Edmund. My name is Edgar, and I am your father's son. The gods are just. They use the vices we enjoy As the means to punish us. Conceiving you Cost him his eyes.

EDMUND: You've said right. It's true.

ALBANY (to Edgar): I thought your very walk Suggested a royal nobility. I welcome you. Let sorrow split my heart if I ever Hated you or your father!

EDGAR: Worthy prince, I know that.

ALBANY: Where have you been hiding? How did you know your father's miseries?

EDGAR: By nursing them, my lord. Listen to a brief tale. To escape the threat

Of death that was upon me, I dressed in rags
 And behaved like a madman. In this clothing
 I met my father with his bleeding eye sockets
 After he'd been blinded. I became his guide,
 Begged for him, saved him from despair.
 I never revealed myself to him until
 Half an hour ago, when I was in armor.
 I asked his blessing and told him of my
 pilgrimage
 From first to last. His injured heart, torn
 Between joy and grief, burst with happiness.

EDMUND: This speech of yours has touched me,
 And it may do some good. Go on.
 You look as if you have more to say.

EDGAR: While I was bawling out my grief
 A man came by. When he recognized me,
 He wrapped his strong arms around my neck
 And cried out as if he'd burst the heavens.
 Then he embraced my father, and told him
 The most pitiful tale of Lear and himself
 That anyone ever heard. As he told it,
 His grief grew stronger, and his hold on life
 Began to slip. Then the trumpets sounded,
 and I left him, unconscious.

ALBANY: But who was this?

EDGAR: Kent, sir—the banished Kent.
 In disguise he followed the king who had
 Banished him, serving him better
 than any slave.

(A gentleman enters, holding a bloody knife.)

GENTLEMAN: Help, help! Oh, help!

EDGAR: What does that bloody knife mean?

GENTLEMAN: It's warm . . . it's steaming . . .

It came from the heart of . . . Oh! She's dead!

ALBANY: Who's dead? Speak, man.

GENTLEMAN: Your lady, sir, your wife. And she
Has poisoned her sister. She has confessed it.

EDMUND: I was engaged to both of them!
All three of us will be united soon.

EDGAR: Here comes Kent.

ALBANY: Bring in the bodies, alive or dead.
The judgment of the heavens, which we fear,
has no pity on us.

(The gentleman leaves. Kent enters.)

KENT: I have come to bid my king and master
An everlasting good night. Is he not here?

ALBANY: A serious oversight! Speak, Edmund,
Where's the king? And where's Cordelia?

(The bodies of Goneril and Regan are brought in.)

Do you see this, Kent?

KENT: Alas! What happened?

EDMUND: So Edmund was indeed loved!
One poisoned the other for my sake,
And then killed herself.

ALBANY: Indeed so. Cover their faces.

EDMUND: I pant for life. I want to do some good,
In spite of my own nature. Go quickly
To the castle! I've given orders there for the
Deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Make haste.
Get there in time.

ALBANY: Run, run! Oh, run!

EDGAR: To whom, my lord? Who is in charge?
Send your token, ordering a reprieve.

EDMUND: Good thinking. Take my sword.
Give it to the captain.

EDGAR (*giving Edmund's sword to an officer*): Hurry!
On your life!

(*The **officer** runs off.*)

EDMUND (*to Albany*): He has orders from
Your wife and me to hang Cordelia in the
Prison and say her despair led to her suicide.

ALBANY: May the gods protect her!
(*to servants*) Take him away for the moment.

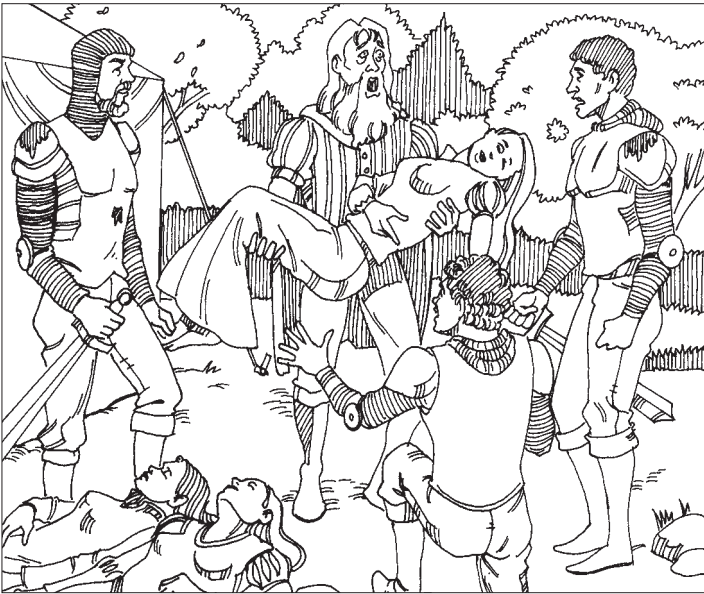
(*Edmund is carried off. Lear enters again, with Cordelia
dead in his arms.*)

LEAR: Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, you are men
Of stone! She's gone forever!

KENT (*kneeling before Lear*): Oh, my good master!

LEAR: Go away!

EDGAR: It is the noble Kent, your friend.



LEAR: A plague upon you! Murderers, traitors!
I might have saved her.
Now she's gone forever! Cordelia, Cordelia!
Stay awhile!
(*He puts his ear to her lips.*) What's that you say?
Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and
Low—an excellent thing in woman.
I killed the wretch who was hanging you!

OFFICER: It's true, my lords. He did.

LEAR: Didn't I, man?
(*seeing Kent*) Who are you? Aren't you Kent?

KENT: The same. Your servant, Kent.
Where is your servant Caius?

LEAR (*recognizing the name Kent used when disguised*):

He's a good fellow, I can tell you that!

He'll fight, and quickly, too.

(*sadly*) He's dead and decayed.

KENT: No, my good lord. I am the very man

Who has followed in your sad steps

From the beginning of your declining fortunes.

LEAR (*not understanding*): You are welcome here.

KENT: All is dreary, dark, and deadly. Your

Eldest daughters have killed themselves in
hopeless desperation.

LEAR (*still not understanding*): Yes, I think so.

ALBANY: He doesn't know what he is saying.

It's no use to talk to him.

EDGAR: No use at all.

(*An officer enters.*)

OFFICER: Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY: That's of little importance here.

Lords and nobles, know what I intend to do.

We shall comfort this noble ruin of mankind

As best we can. As for us, we will resign

And turn our power over to this old majesty

For the remainder of his life.

(*to Edgar and Kent*) As for you,

You resume your honorable places,

With such additional titles as your noble deeds

Have more than earned. All friends shall
Be rewarded for their loyalty, and all foes
Punished as they deserve. Oh, look, look!

LEAR: My poor child is hanged! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And you no breath at all? You'll come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!
(*He struggles with his collar.*) Please,
Undo this button. Thank you, sir.
Do you see this? Look at her! Look! Her lips!
Look there, look there!
(*Overcome by grief, he dies.*)

EDGAR: He's fainted! (*shaking Lear*) My lord!

KENT: Break, heart. I beg you, break!

EDGAR (*still shaking Lear*): Wake up, my lord!

KENT: Don't trouble his departing spirit.
Let him go! Only an enemy would make
Him suffer any longer in this rough world.

ALBANY: Bear them away. General mourning
Is our present concern.
(*to Kent and Edgar*) Friends, you two shall bear
the burden of this kingdom.

EDGAR: We must get through this sad time.
The oldest have suffered most. We young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

(*The bodies are taken away in a slow march.*)

KING LEAR

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*“How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to
have a thankless child!”*

The king is weary. To get peace in his old age,
he turns over his kingdom to his daughters.
What does he get in return for his generosity?
Betrayal, warfare . . . and madness.

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